

Speaking basics

Every spoken presentation consists of:

Verbal component

W o r d s

What you say

Non-verbal component

E v e r y t h i n g e l s e

How you say it

Vocal: rate, pitch, volume of voice, pause

Visual: body movement, facial expression, dress, visual aids

Preparation of the non-verbal component is as important – if not more important – than the preparation of the words.

Nervousness in front of an audience can best be controlled if:

- you are well prepared
- you have a strong message that you believe in
- you remember that the audience is not against you

Hints for the five minutes just before you speak:

Mentally

- Concentrate on the main message that you want the audience to take away.
- Run the opening words through your mind and imagine yourself in front of the audience starting confidently.
- Reassure yourself that your presentation is well researched and that it will be interesting to this audience.

Physically

- Take slow, deep breaths.
- If possible, have water nearby in case of a dry mouth. This should be room temperature, not iced. Cold water constricts the vocal cords.

The 7-step plan

Step 1

- ☐ Determine your purpose: 'What do I want to achieve with this presentation?'
- ☐ Research your audience: 'What points do they have in common?'
- ☐ Brainstorm
– and list *everything*.

Step 2

- ☐ Determine your message
(in one short sentence).
- ☐ Choose your 'angle of approach'.
- ☐ Decide on two or three main points.

Step 3

- ☐ Arrange your points in a logical order.
- ☐ Formulate your plan.
- ☐ Decide what else you will use off your brainstorming sheet and where it will fit.

Step 4

- ☐ Write the introduction.
- ☐ Write the conclusion.
- ☐ Write the body of the speech.

Step 5

- ☐ Check where to put emphasis and pauses.
- ☐ Decide what gestures you will use to emphasise important points.
- ☐ Determine if visual aids would be useful.

Step 6

- ☐ Rehearse in front of a mirror and/or with a tape recorder – with your prompt notes.
- ☐ Refine – check the length of your presentation against the time allotted.

Step 7

- ☐ Rehearse – in front of a 'live' audience if possible (one or two people is fine).
- ☐ Prepare your introductory notes for your introducer (if appropriate).
- ☐ (On the day of the presentation) check the venue as soon as possible – arrive early.

hint
hint
hint

Start working on this program as soon as possible. A presentation completed some time in advance will *always* turn out better than one left until the last minute. Unexpected emergencies happen to us all. If you leave your preparation until the last minute, then you are vulnerable. Remember, the audience is generally not interested in any excuses you might have for not being well prepared.

The persuasive oral

Define your purpose

By the end of this presentation the audience will be persuaded to ...

Opening statement

Gain attention by the use of shock, question, promise of benefit etc

Message

What you think should change

I believe that ...

Point out the relevance

The reason this is important to us is ...

Support material

Facts, statistics, stories, examples

Point out the advantages

The benefit to you of changing this is ...

Link your message to a task

We can all do something about this, for example ...

Conclusion

Restate message and advantages Finish with encouragement

Message

Advantage(s)

We can start today by ...

Remember: Know your audience

To persuade any group you must know:

- what is important to them – to help you point out the advantages of change to them
- what is possible for them – to help you choose a 'task' for them to do

Openings

Essential points to remember

- An opening must get the audience's attention early.
- It is similar to a newspaper article in the way it generally puts the essential points of the story 'up front'. Sometimes you can vary from this so your message is not revealed until later in the presentation, but this runs the risk of losing the audience's interest.
- It should be short (10–20% of the overall length of the presentation).
- The use of humour is suggested (if appropriate) because it
 - gains the audience's attention
 - makes them more likely to listen to you

Techniques for openings

Shock them with a startling opening statement but make sure it has a valid link to your subject

Arouse their curiosity – first identify their common points of interest and state 'what's in it for them' to listen to your presentation

Ask a question.

Use special effects like sound, lighting, etc.

Create a link between your message and the occasion at which you are speaking – the time, place, event, etc.

hint

Gaining the audience's attention is always much easier if you can identify their common points of interest. Remember, everybody is listening with the thought 'what's in this for me?' and if you can tell them early your presentation has a much greater chance of being successful.

Conclusions

The conclusion is important because the last thing that an audience hears may be the only thing that they remember.

It does not add any new information but it must:

- summarise the content of the presentation
- restate the main message

It links back to the opening so that the audience has a sense of completion – feeling that your presentation has come full circle.

It will tie up any loose ends – keeping any promises made as part of the opening or in the body of the presentation.

In a persuasive presentation you should always include something for the audience to do as part of the conclusion. What this says to them is 'If I have persuaded you in this presentation – here is what you can do about it.'

It should be about the same length as the opening (10–20% of the overall length of the presentation).

hint

Your conclusion should be delivered in a way that leaves your listeners in no doubt that you have finished your presentation. This means that the energy level of your presentation should rise to give a strong finish. Just as your opening needed to be forceful to get their attention, your conclusion has to be just as forceful to make them remember you.

The most common causes of poor conclusions is failing to link back strongly enough to the opening. Writing the conclusion side-by-side with the opening is one way of making sure that these links are clear to the audience.

hint

Written vs. spoken English

The writer	The speaker
If given the choice of using a short word or a longer synonym will tend towards the latter to enhance the presentation (and impress the reader) with the greatest possible use of vocabulary.	Will generally choose the shortest word that conveys the meaning.
Will try to avoid repetition.	Uses repetition for emphasis.
Tends to write sentences that are long and can be quite complex.	Keeps sentences as short as possible to minimise the chances of needing to take a breath mid-sentence and to make it easy for the audience to follow.
Uses a language that tends to be more formal than conversational language.	Tries to keep the language as conversational as possible, but has the ability to vary it to suit the audience.
Is not generally concerned with the sound of the words.	Knows that the sounds of words contribute to their meaning. How easy a word is to pronounce may affect its choice.
Cannot generally refer to specific surroundings.	Can include references to the specific time, place and prevailing circumstances.
Has to ensure that the entire message is contained in the words as written.	Knows that a great deal of the meaning will come from the way that the words are said.

hint

When writing a sentence, you could underline important words to emphasise. Sometimes a longer pause after a particularly important phrase can really help it make an impact. Use slashes // to 'write' the pauses into your speech.

Written vs. spoken English

Take these sample sentences and rewrite them to be more effective for a spoken presentation. An example is provided.

Sample sentence

Everyone involved in this situation must do all within their power to prevent this tragic circumstance from occurring.

Rewritten for spoken delivery

We must do all we can to stop this tragedy.

- 1 The subject of my presentation is one which is of immense importance to every person present here today.

- 2 Consequently, this scenario has become highly problematic, to the point that the protagonists are seriously considering their options regarding withdrawal.

- 3 At this point in time, all the people assembled here have had ample opportunity to peruse the correspondence regarding this year's negative profit outcome.

- 4 There will be no variation to the status quo until the perpetrators have sufficient incentive to desist from their current course of action.

- 5 Her demeanour led us to believe that she had been the recipient of some very favourable news.

Devices for speechmaking

Alliteration is created when two or more words in a phrase start with the same consonant. It has the effect of making a phrase more memorable.

Examples

fear of failure

people power

Assonance is repetition of the same vowel sounds followed by different consonants.

Examples

a stitch in time saves nine *oozing moving mud*

A **catchphrase** 'catches' the attention and sticks in the memory. They are generally short, often humorous and can make your speech more memorable.

Examples

Oh what a feeling

Just do it

Humour can improve your presentation and make your message more likely to be remembered.

- Keep it relevant to the subject and audience.
- Avoid in-jokes (any joke that would not be understood by every member of the audience).
- Rework existing funny lines rather than trying to write completely original ones.
- Humour tends to work best when placed in the opening or body of your presentation. If used in the conclusion it can distract the audience from your main message.
- Always be clear why you are using humour. Its greatest uses are to gain the audience's attention, and (when linked to the main message) to make your presentation more memorable.
- Delivery skills add a great deal to the success of humour. Your use of pause, tone of voice and facial expression in particular greatly affect how well any funny line will work.

Juxtaposition places two opposites together to create a more dramatic impact. It works on the idea that many things become clearer in contrast.

Examples

Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.

It's nice to be important, but it's more important to be nice.

A **metaphor** makes a comparison between two things, identifying one with the other.

Examples

This classroom is a torture chamber.

Public fraud is a cancer – eating at the foundations of our society.

Onomatopoeia is the use of words that sound similar to the sounds they describe.

Examples

crunch rattle hiss splash.

Puns use words in a humorous way that suggests two or more meanings.

Example

He wanted desperately to be a good golfer – you could say he had a driving ambition.

Quotations add authority to your presentation. Good quotes require two things: relevance to your subject and significance of the person who made it. In order of preference, select quotes from:

- one of the characters from your speech, particularly if they are well known or are seen as having some authority on the subject
- any person known well enough to the audience not to require a description
- any person who can be described adequately in one or two words
- any other person. (The disadvantage of using these is that you can spend a lot of time explaining who it is you are quoting which could distract the audience from your point.)

Rhyming words can add to the catchiness of a phrase. Used sparingly, rhyme makes a speech more memorable.

Examples

Do the crime and do the time Drive to arrive alive

Signposts help keep an audience on track. Regular signposts point the way or signal a new idea to your audience. Examples:

- In the opening: *What I'm going to do today is cover three aspects of this very important subject.*
- During the presentation: *So, let's look at what we have covered so far.*
- In the conclusion: *The most important point of all is ... or If you only remember one thing, make sure it is this.*

The more complicated your presentation, the more signposts you will need.

Similes are really useful for graphic description – so they serve the same purpose as metaphors. Similes are distinguished by their use of the word 'like'.

Examples

He came running across the park like an excited puppy.

A **triplet** adds impact by use of repetition in 'bunches' of three. Triplets can be used in a number of ways. For example:

- repeating a word or phrase: *So much unemployment, so much despair, so much wasted opportunity ... or I was tired. I was cold. I was prepared to do anything to get a room for the night.*
- using three verbs: *It has been engineered for strength, designed for durability and built for the toughest conditions.*
- using three nouns: *Every home needs one, every apartment needs one, every office building needs one.*

The voice

The main factors in using your voice effectively are:

Volume: use as wide a range as possible, but make sure everyone can hear you.

Example

a louder voice might suit a situation when there is some urgency about a situation; a softer voice would be more appropriate for telling a sad story.

Pace: make sure that the pace fits the meaning of what you are saying at the time.

Use as much variation as you can.

Examples

a description of walking on a beach at sunset might be given at a slower pace to match the peacefulness of the scene; a description of whitewater rafting would use a faster pace and louder volume to match the excitement.

Inflection: this is the rise and fall of the pitch of your voice. It adds a lot of meaning to the words you say. A rising inflection (voice going up) at the end of a sentence suggests doubt or lack of confidence. A falling inflection (voice going down) generally conveys authority or determination.

Tone: the tone of voice you use has a large effect on your listeners. Some examples of the range of meaning that can be conveyed by the tone of your voice are encouraging, scolding, enthusiastic, uplifting, sarcastic or humorous.

Articulation: how clearly you pronounce the words of your presentation determines how well your presentation is understood and accepted. It may be that:

- you fail to finish words fully, for example by dropping the 'g' in words such as goin' and comin'.
- you miss parts of words (gov'ment)
- you run the end of one word into the start of the next (somethinelse)

Poor articulation is often a result of trying to speak too quickly.

✱ **Pause:** One of the most effective ways to use the voice is when it is not used at all. Pauses are essential if a presentation is to be successful.

Important points should always be followed by a pause – the more important the point, the longer the pause.

hint

A tape recorder is very helpful when you are preparing your presentation. Record yourself and listen for where you could improve your articulation and use of pause and emphasis. Don't be put off if your voice sounds different in the recording from how you normally hear yourself. Everyone hears themselves differently from how they sound to others.

The voice

- 1 Work in pairs. Take turns to say each other's first names using the following tones:

- a formal
- b friendly
- c irritated (eg they are making you late for an appointment)
- d angry (eg they made you miss the appointment)
- e cajoling (eg you want them to do you a favour)

Identify the differences in tone and inflection that allowed you to express such a wide range of meaning with just the one word.

- 2 Say the sentence 'This is really important' in the following ways:

- a with your voice tone rising on the word 'important'
- b with your voice tone falling on the word 'important'

Notice the difference in meaning. Which sounds more confident?

Use different pitch and tone of voice to give the following words different meanings:

- c Fantastic!
- d That's very smart!

- 3 Examine the following passage from AB (Banjo) Paterson's 'The Man from Snowy River' to determine how variation in pace and volume could make the delivery more effective.

- a Name two lines that you would speak more quickly and explain why.
- b Name a line that you would speak more slowly and explain why.
- c Name two lines that you would speak more loudly and explain why.

When they reached the mountain's summit, even Clancy took a pull, 1
 It well might make the boldest hold their breath 2
 The wild hop scrub grew thickly, and the hidden ground was full 3
 Of wombat holes, and any slip was death. 4
 But the man from Snowy River let the pony have his head, 5
 And he swung his stockwhip round and gave a cheer, 6
 And he raced him down the mountain like a torrent down its bed, 7
 While the others stood and watched in very fear. 8
 He sent the flintstones flying, but the pony kept his feet, 9
 He cleared the fallen timber in his stride, 10
 And the man from Snowy River never shifted in his seat - 11
 It was grand to see that mountain horseman ride. 12
 Through the stringybarks and saplings, on the rough and broken ground, 13
 Down the hillside at a racing pace he went; 14
 And he never drew the bridle till he landed safe and sound, 15
 At the bottom of that terrible descent. 16

Making your presentation visual with gestures

The VISUAL part of a speech (what an audience sees) is very important.

- Audiences and adjudicators judge you on your body language.
- Try to avoid negative distractions such as hands in pockets, hands behind back, touching hair, shuffling feet, etc.
- Adopt the 'speaker neutral stance' of arms by your side in a relaxed manner, feet slightly apart and a confident look on your face.

GESTURES should be part of any speech.

- Gestures need as much planning as words.
- They add impact to the parts of your speech you want your audience to remember: size can be shown by use of your hands and arms; numbers by use of fingers; body movement by use of posture.
- Gestures need to grow with the size of your audience. A large audience may require gestures that feel 'too big' for you in order to be 'big enough' for all your audience to see.

EYE CONTACT is the part of body language that contributes most to a speaker's credibility.

- Eye contact means looking at someone long enough for them to meet your eyes.
- Even if using comprehensive notes or reading, the need for eye contact does not diminish.
- Try to look at the audience as you are speaking, even if it means a slower delivery.
- Look down, read the notes then look up and speak.

Making your presentation visual with gestures

1 Devise at least two different gestures that could be used with the following words:

- a huge _____

- b tiny _____

- c unimportant _____

- d scary _____

- e determined _____

2 Devise a 'cluster' (group or series) of gestures to accompany the following phrases:

- a *I opened the cupboard to find it empty!*

- b *This is really important.*

- c *I was so confused – I didn't know which way was up and which was down.*

Once you have devised your gestures, record them in note form to accompany a presentation.

Making a presentation visual with pictures

Your presentation has a visual effect on the audience through:

- body language
- visual aids

You can paint pictures in the audience's 'mind' with your words – by storytelling.

Storytelling guidelines

- Set the scene by first describing the background and gradually working forward to the central action or character/s.
- Describe your characters with as few words as possible:
 - use the two-word generalisation of adjective + noun: eg kindly grandmother, shy teenager
 - give an indication of their age
 - try to give your characters names
- Include description of how the scene feels (hot/cold), smells, etc.
- Choose words that match your scene – soft words to describe a peaceful scene, sharp words with hard consonants for describing action.

Using visual aids

- Try to include a visual aid in your presentations. Projected images, samples, videos and models are all effective.
- Plan how you will include the visuals. The relevant visual should only be visible to the audience while you are talking about that point. Audience members will continue to look at an image as long as you show it to them, so make sure that it is off or out of the way as soon as you've finished with it. With videos and computer presentations particular care is required because a hissing 'snowy' screen or blinking cursor is just as distracting.
- Plan very carefully if the room needs to be darkened for any projected images to be seen. Turning lights on and off is very distracting to an audience and should be avoided if at all possible. If it cannot be avoided, choose a volunteer from the audience to stand by the lights to turn them on and off on a signal from you.
- Check the projection/video equipment beforehand to ensure that you know where the controls are and that it is focused.
- Try to check from the audience's position to see if any people will be unable to see clearly. If it's possible to move the screen or monitor then do so; if not, it might be possible to have those people move.
- Make sure any projected image (OHT, etc) is high contrast and as simple as possible.
- An effective visual aid creates its impact immediately – the audience should not have to read or decipher it.

hint

If a diagram or slogan can add to a presentation use it. If it will distract the audience's attention from the speaker – don't!

The use of notes

Most of the time that you are doing oral presentations, you will be using some form of notes. Your choices are:

- A full script (not allowed in many types of oral presentations): While many speakers feel that having a full script gives them more confidence, in fact it is a hindrance to an effective presentation, causing speakers to lose eye contact and vocal variety.
- Prompt notes (placed on a lectern, table or desk): You can use up to two A4 pages without needing to touch the notes.
- Palm cards: You can move about more freely – but hand gestures are restricted. Extra care is required in moving from one card to another so that it doesn't become distracting.

Remember – unless specifically asked for, an oral presentation does not mean reading to your audience.

hint

Your speech plan makes an excellent set of prompt notes or palm cards.

General guidelines for written notes

- Try to have your notes centre more on the ideas rather than the actual words which you will be tempted to read.
- Type them double-spaced with each sentence starting a new line. Never carry a sentence from one page to another.
- Only use one side of the page and use separate pages (not joined together in a pad).
- Number the pages and hold with a paper clip if necessary but **do not** staple them together.
- When you are about to speak, place all pages to one side of the lectern and slide the pages across as you finish with them. This avoids any turning of pages which is obvious to the audience.
- Use every method possible (underlining, highlighting, bolding, etc) to make it easier to find the right place again after looking up at your audience.
- You don't have to restrict yourself to words. Use symbols, signs, anything that will quickly prompt your memory.

Most speakers write twice as many notes as they need. Most notes should be one or two words – with only key phrases written in full.

hint